

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *MAXIMUM RIDE*

JAMES PATTERSON

THE DANGEROUS DAYS OF
DANIEL X

& MICHAEL LEDWIDGE

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For Jack, Keelan, Cara, and Brynna

True Confessions

IF THIS WERE A MOVIE instead of real life, this would be the part where in a strange, ominous voice I'd say, "Take me to your leader!"

But since *you* are far more important in making a difference in this world than the earth's leaders and last time I checked on the Internet those leaders seem to have more than enough on their plates and for the most part I'm not a total dork, I'll just go with a simple "Hi."

My name is Daniel, and this is the first volume of my life story, which, hopefully, will be a very long and distinguished one.

Why should you read it? Very good question.

Maybe because this is your planet, and you have a right to know what's actually happening on it.

And more important, *off* it.

Trust me, there are legions of strange and disturbing creatures out there you probably *don't* want to know about.

Like the fast-breeding creeps with burnt-looking me*tallic faces and deer horns bristling above hornet noses and stingers, who populate the American Midwest and parts of Europe. Or some very nasty sluglike thingies with jowls like water balloons about to burst all over much of Japan and China as well as New York City and Vancouver. Plus a host of human-skeletonish freaks with tentacle hair and green multifaceted fly eyes; some white chocolate-colored cretins that look like giant human babies, only with glowing television fuzz for their eyes and mouths; and a praying mantis-looking race with shrunken heads, long red dreadlocks, and a pathetic need to kill, operating in the general area of Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

Maybe I should stop talking, though, before I get too far ahead of myself.

To those of you who feel that you've heard enough, let me say I'm sorry I had to give you a glimpse of what's really out there, and would you please close the cover of this book down tightly on your way out.

Now, the rest of you, I need you to do three important things.

1. Take a deep, deep breath.
2. Disregard everything anyone has ever told you about life on earth.
3. Turn the page.

THAT WRETCHED LIST

I WISH THAT I didn't sometimes, but I remember everything about that cursed, unspeakably unhappy night twelve years ago, when I was just three years old and both my parents were murdered.

I was taking an ordinary can of Play-Doh down from the playroom shelf when my mom called from the top of the basement stairs.

"Daniel? Dinner will be ready in five minutes. Time to start wrapping things up, honey."

Finish? Already? I made a face. *But my latest masterpiece isn't done yet!*

"Yes, Mom," I called. "One minute. I'm making Play-Doh history down here."

"Of course you are, dear. I would expect nothing less. Love you. Always."

"Love you back, Mom. Always."

In case you've already noticed that I didn't speak like a typical three-year-old, well, you should have seen what I was building.

I stared at the museum-quality replica of the Lighthouse of Alexandria I was trying to finish.

Behind it, all the way to the edge of my worktable, stood matchless reproductions I'd made of the remaining Seven Wonders of the Ancient World:

The Great Pyramid of Giza

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The Statue of Zeus at Olympia

The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

The Mausoleum of Mausolus

The Colossus of Rhodes

I would have liked to do the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Chrysler Building as well, but I was only allowed one hour of playtime a day.

I squinted suddenly as I spotted what looked like a tiny, flat black seed climbing up the side of my miniature lighthouse, and really moving too.

Whoa there, little guy! Where do you think you're motoring to?

It was an Arthropoda Arachnida Acari Metastigmata, I thought, recalling the phylum, class, order, and suborder of the tiny creature at a glance. A tick. A young male dog tick, to be exact.

"Hey, little fella," I whispered to the tick. "You on a sightseeing tour?"

Two things happened next, almost simultaneously. Two very odd and unforgettable things.

There was a strange shimmering at the back of my bright, turquoise-blue eyes.

And the tick slowly rose onto its hind legs and said, "Hey, Daniel, my brother, you do real nice work. *Cool lighthouse!*"

I LAUGHED HYSTERICALLY as the lickety-split-quick tick crawled higher and higher on the lighthouse. Well, technically I was the one making it crawl, and tell jokes.

With my mind!

Yes, you heard that correctly. I was causing the tick to do tricks and also talk. It's a talent I have. Long story. *Good* story, but not for right now. Something earth-shattering was about to happen at our house.

Anyway, I had the little fellow give a wave before it flipped forward and did a one-clawed handstand on the top of the lighthouse.

And at that exact, unforgettable instant, I suddenly flew back off the bench as a wall-shaking explosion detonated in the room above my head.

Something enormous had just crashed into the kitchen! *Was it a freight train? A plane?*

A sick feeling ripped through my stomach. *Where was my mom?*

"The List!" I now heard a deep, strangled voice roar from the kitchen above. "You think you can hide it from *me!* I know you have The List. *And I want it! NOW!*"

I climbed to my feet, my mouth open, my eyes wide and locked onto the ceiling.

"Don't hurt us! Please!" my mother sobbed. "Who are you? What list?"

"Wait, wait. Hold on," I heard my father say. "Lower the gun, my friend. I'll get The List for you. I have it nearby."

"The List is *here?*" The deep voice loomed once again. "Right here? In this pathetic little hovel in Kansas, of all places?"

"Yes. Now if you'll just lower the —"

I fell to the floor again as a string of deafening explosions drowned out my father's voice. *Shooting*, I thought, my eyes clenched shut, my hands flying to my ears. *An Opus 24/24*, I realized with the same instantaneous knowledge that I'd had about the Arthropoda Arachnida Acariformes Metastigmata, the dog tick.

Then I heard my father call out, "We love you, Daniel. *Always.*"

The clanging echo of the shots hung in the silence after the Opus finally stopped.

"Stay right there. Don't get up, either of you. *As if you could,*" the stranger said with a nasty laugh. "I'll go find The List myself."

Mom? I thought, tears flooding down my cheeks. *Dad?*

Then another terrible thought entered my mind, and it was bright and urgent as a neon sign.

"The aliens are here," I whispered, and reached up and clicked off the basement light. I prepared to be eaten, or maybe worse.

Three

I WAS TREMBLING and pressing my small, vulnerable body up against an old water heater, petrified about what might have just happened to my mom and dad, when a beam of violet-tinged light shone down the stairs into the basement.

And then I saw it—a six-and-a-half-foot-tall praying mantis. At least it had taken that terrible form tonight.

From behind the water heater, I stared in horror at the creature's long, grossly bulging, plump-colored body, its small, almost shrunken head, its large, liquid-black eyes. What a foul beast! It had long, stringy red dreadlocks hanging down between its antennae, and a dull black metal assault rifle cradled in its sharply jointed arms.

"I know you're down here, boy," the XXL-sized insect said with a slow, horrifying roll of its stalklike neck. "I am called The Prayer, and there is very little that The Prayer does not know. If you come to me now, I may go easy on you. *May*. But I do hereby promise, cross my heart and hope to live forever, if you continue to make me play this silly game of hide-and-seek, you are going to learn the meaning of the word *punishment*."

This abomination, this beast that dared call itself The Prayer, proceeded to tear the basement apart, obviously looking for The List. Powered by its massive legs it suddenly leaped upstairs and trashed the rest of the house—screeching, "*LIST! LIST! LIST! LIST!*"

Then it was back in my playspace, looking for me, no doubt angrier and hungrier than ever.

The Prayer smiled eerily then, flashing jagged yellow, broken-bottle-shard teeth. It covered fifteen feet of room with a single hop.

"Game over, you pathetic little pukemeister. Maybe *you* know where The List is. *Do you? Do YOU?*"

That's when I realized that behind the thick wall of fear, my mind was actually trying to save me. *Of course*, I thought. I had a plan, a shred of hope that could salvage my life.

The Prayer swung its evil-looking head around the side of the water heater.

And found *absolutely nothing!*

THE REPUGNANT FREAK GASPED with surprise and outrage. “*What?*” it screeched at the top of its voice range. “Not possible! I smelled you there a second ago!”

Well, technically I was still right there. I looked cross-eyed at my new beaklike hypostome as it scurried away on my eight new clawed legs. The answer to my immediate problem had been straightforward: *all I needed to do was make myself less conspicuous to the murderous beast.*

Do you follow what had just happened? The full significance of it? It’s important.

You see, my abilities didn’t stop at being able to make ticks talk and do tricks.

Now I was the tick. I had transformed myself.

Towering above me like a skyscraper, The Prayer opened its razor-sharp jaws and there was a bubbling-wet, sickening sound. Then a jet of jellylike blue flame shot from his mouth. The basement walls, carpet, and ceiling caught fire in the blink of my eyes.

“Take that, you little nothing! I flame-broil my meat. Like Burger King! And Beelzebub!”

Still in tiny tick form, I raced away from the smoke and scorching heat until I was crushed against the basement’s concrete foundation wall, which now seemed as big as a cliff to me.

I reached up tentatively with one of my claws. Some good news at last. My claw stuck to the concrete like superglue.

Next I was scampering up the wall behind The Prayer’s head. Then I jumped and landed smack dab in the center of the alien’s greasy, dreadlocked hair.

I locked my hypostome down tight like a seat belt on a strand of his hair just as the homicidal Prayer jumped effortlessly to the top of the burning basement stairs again.

There I got a horrific, never-to-be-forgotten look at my mom and dad lying facedown on the kitchen floor. I knew they were dead and there was nothing I could do for them. I *knew* it in my head and soul. I just couldn’t believe it yet, couldn’t accept it.

Then The Prayer smashed through the kitchen window and burst into the night.

“*FAILURE! FAILURE! FAILURE!*” it bellowed. “*I hate failure! WHERE IS THE LIST?*”

Something struck my head then, the end of a tree branch maybe, and I found myself flying through the cold air. The breath was knocked out of me, and I landed hard on the packed dirt floor of the woods behind our farmhouse.

I was a three-year-old boy again. *Transformed.* No longer a tick. I stood and turned back, and stared in disbelief and terror that could find no voice at that awful moment.

Already our house was a blazing shell of its former self. My mom and dad were dead and being incinerated inside. There was the sound of glass shattering as the upstairs window to my bedroom blew out with the heat.

Then, for a long time, there was the roar of the flames, and my soft, little-boy cries as I stood alone in the world for the first time, orphaned and homeless.

I recalled a song my mom used to sing to me: *Star light, star bright. First star I see tonight. Shiny and my dad loved the skies and the stars.*

And I remember thinking, very clearly, as if I had suddenly grown up on that horrifyingly unforgettable night: *I know where The List is—my father has taken me to see it many times. Maybe for just this reason.*

And I know what it is: The List of Alien Outlaws on Terra Firma.

And I know who I am: Daniel, son of Graff, son of Terfdron—the Alien Hunter.

No last name, just Daniel X.

I have to tell you one more thing about that night. I must get it out.

Even though I was only three years old, I am ashamed that I didn't fight The Prayer to the death.

Chapter 1

TWELVE YEARS HAVE PASSED. I'm fifteen now. All grown up, sort of.

When I tell you that I've seen it all and done it all, I'm not lying or boasting—though sometimes I wish I were, and that I lived a normal life in some place like Peoria, Illinois, or Red Bank, New Jersey.

Since the death of my mom and dad, and in my years as an Alien Hunter—up to and including the present moment of extraordinary jeopardy—I've been kidnapped by faceless metallic humanoid aliens. *Twice.*

I've been chased and caught by a shape-shifting proto-plasm in London who wanted to make me into a jelly sandwich, without the bread.

I have done hand-to-antennae combat with an entire civilization of insects in Mexico City, Cuernavaca, and Acapulco.

I've had my face run over again and again—for days—by self-replicating machines that were about to take over Detroit. *And wait—it gets worse.*

A billion or so “little wailing mouths” connected by an electrical network to a single mind—don't know how else to describe them—ate and digested me in Hamburg, Germany.

I will *not* tell you how I got out of that one.

But this particular creature, *currently right in my face*, was really, really testing my limits, and my patience.

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